

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

October 4, 1967

Early Medicine in West

The senior Dr. John Parker, an old time doctor in Monterey County, wrote in his notes that his first introduction to Castroville was on the morning of Nov. 5, 1874. He had arrived during the night and taken a room at the old Overland Hotel. There was a gang fight on the street and as he stepped out of the hotel to find what the commotion was all about he heard a shot and saw a man sink to the pavement. This man was his first patient in Castroville.

“Another familiar character among the MD's of that day was Dr. Jeffery. He was a Confederate surgeon and had one arm, but he would operate and tie knots with one hand. It has been said that people would have operations just to see Dr. Jeffery use his single hand,” the late Dr. Garth Parker said in his talk before the Monterey County Historical Society in Salinas in 1950.

Dr. E.K. Abbott was another Civil War doctor. He had received his AB from a small institution in Michigan, then went all the way through the Civil War and after it was over he returned to the University of Michigan and received his MD degree. He was an expert botanist, and an ardent prohibitionist. He also kept the United States meteorological record for many years.

A surgeon by the name of Pedro Prat accompanied any early expedition to Monterey in 1769 but he returned to Mexico the following year. Other medical men in Monterey from 1773 to 1894 were Pedro Castan, Jose Davila, who stayed from 1774 to 1783; Pablo Carbajal was here from 1791 to 1800 and Jose Casitllo remained from 1792 to 1818. Manuel Torres stayed one year, Jose Maria Benites four years, and Manuel de Alva came in 1831 and remained nine years. He was followed in succession by Manuel Crespo, Edward Bale and Faustine Moro. Francisco Torres, a Mexican, was in practice in Monterey in 1835; John Townsend and Andres Castellero signed a certificate of ill health as “profesores de medicina” in March 1846.

In 1785 the vice regal government transmitted to Monterey 20 copies of a treatise on smallpox, which had been sent from Spain, and ordered their distribution among the people. In 1787 the viceroy ordered that precautions against the disease should be enforced.

In May 1787 the smallpox epidemic was brought to Monterey. On May 25 the ayuntamiento (common council) determined to establish a clinic for poor patients.

A board of health was appointed as follows: Thomas O. Larkin, David Spence, Watson and Osio, presided over by Serrano. A house on the outskirts was rented at a monthly rental of eight dollars.

The governor agreed to give \$125 monthly during the continuance of the epidemic. Governor Micheltoarena individually gave \$25, the bishop \$25, Larkin \$5, and others \$1 to \$4 each. The promised amounted to \$249 and that was the first hospital established in California.

The ayuntamiento of Monterey in 1836 appointed a commission to select a burying ground for foreigners separate from the resident Catholics. On the 31st of July, 1839, the cemetery at Monterey was consecrated, having been in used since 1770. It was 60 veras square; the wall was built by the convicts, under the auspices of Gov. Alvarado.